

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

Case No. 9:23-cv-81281

CHRISTOPHER SADOWSKI,

Plaintiff,

v.

UNLAWFUL THREADS LLC,

Defendant.

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**COMPLAINT**

Plaintiff Christopher Sadowski (“Plaintiff”) sues Unlawful Threads LLC (“Defendant”), and alleges as follows:

**THE PARTIES**

1. Plaintiff is an individual who is a citizen of the State of New Jersey residing in the State of New Jersey.

2. Defendant is a limited liability company organized and existing under the laws of the State of Florida with its principal place of business located 10622 Pebble Cove Ln, Boca Raton, FL 33498. Defendant’s agent for service of process is Timothy M Lawler, 10622 Pebble Cove Lane, Boca Raton, FL 33498.

**JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

3. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1338(a).

4. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendant because it maintains sufficient minimum contacts with Florida such that the exercise of jurisdiction over it would not offend

traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

5. Venue properly lies in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1400(a) because Defendant or its agents reside or may be found in this district. “A defendant ‘may be found’ in a district in which he could be served with process; that is, in a district which may assert personal jurisdiction over the defendant.” Palmer v. Braun, 376 F.3d 1254, 1259-60 (11th Cir. 2004). “In other words, ‘if a court has personal jurisdiction over the defendants in a copyright infringement action, venue in that court’s district is proper.’” McGregor v. In Tune Music Grp., No. 15-62044-CIV-ZLOCH, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 190302, at \*11 (S.D. Fla. July 29, 2016) (quoting Store Decor Div. of Jas Int’l, Inc. v. Stylex Worldwide Indus., Ltd., 767 F. Supp. 181, 185 (N.D. Ill. 1991)).

## **FACTS**

### **I. Plaintiff’s Business**

6. Plaintiff is an award-winning photojournalist and is widely published in some of the world’s most important newspapers and magazines, including but not limited to, the *New York Post*, *Daily Mail Online*, *Reader’s Digest*, *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Fox News*, *CBS News*, *NBC News*, *Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek Magazine*, and *People Magazine*.

7. For the past nineteen (19) years, Plaintiff has been self-employed as a professional photographer who specializes in photo-documenting ordinary life and the human condition.

8. Plaintiff travels throughout the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut tri-state area taking photographs that tell a story about tragedy, hope, calamity, joy, discord and renewal.

9. Using state-of-the-art equipment, Plaintiff creates high-end photography licensed by some of the top publishers in this Country. When commissioned for a job, Plaintiff spends

countless hours capturing hundreds of photographs and then processing those photographs to ensure they meet customers' requirements.

10. Plaintiff maintains a commercial website (<http://www.csnyphoto.com>) which describes the photography services offered by Plaintiff, hosts a sample portfolio of photographs taken by Plaintiff, and invites prospective customers to contact Plaintiff to arrange for a professional photo shoot.

11. Plaintiff owns the photographs and serves as the licensing agent with respect to licensing such photographs for limited use by Plaintiff's customers. To that end, Plaintiff's standard terms include a limited, one-time license for use of any single photograph by the customer only. Plaintiff's license terms make clear that all copyright ownership remains with Plaintiff and that its customers are not permitted to transfer, assign, or sub-license any of Plaintiff's photographs to another person/entity.

## **II. The Work at Issue in this Lawsuit**

12. In 2017, Plaintiff created a professional photograph of a Home Depot store titled "012517homedepot14CS, 5/19/2017" (the "Work"). A copy of the Work is exhibited below:



13. The Work was registered by Plaintiff with the Register of Copyrights on June 30, 2017, and was assigned Registration No. VA 2-056-827. A true and correct copy of the Certificate of Registration pertaining to the Work is attached hereto as **Exhibit “A.”**

14. Plaintiff is the owner of the Work and has remained the owner at all times material hereto.

### **III. Defendant’s Unlawful Activities**

16. Defendant is an e-commerce store founded in 2016 offering custom designs for a variety of products such as shirts, mugs, and custom graphics on demand.

17. Defendant advertises/markets its business primarily through its website (<https://unlawfulthreads.com/>), social media (e.g., <https://www.facebook.com/UnlawfulThreads/>, <https://www.facebook.com/morefloridamemes/>, and <https://twitter.com/UnlawfulThreads>) and other forms of advertising.

15. On August 19, 2019 (after Plaintiff’s above-referenced copyright registration of the Work), Defendant published a copy of the Work on its Facebook page (at [https://www.facebook.com/morefloridamemes/photos/check-out-our-florida-store-for-florida-shirts-mugs-stickers-and-wine-tumblers-we-s/1380633602103092/?paipv=0&eav=AfbkSpp4Usur0z9AVSsU0\\_IBVzs04EIa7yM3T33\\_tc72N3pkFa3ZyOD\\_QJQZG0TVgM8&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/morefloridamemes/photos/check-out-our-florida-store-for-florida-shirts-mugs-stickers-and-wine-tumblers-we-s/1380633602103092/?paipv=0&eav=AfbkSpp4Usur0z9AVSsU0_IBVzs04EIa7yM3T33_tc72N3pkFa3ZyOD_QJQZG0TVgM8&_rdr)):



16. A true and correct copy of screenshots of Defendant's website, webpage, and/or social media, displaying the copyrighted Work, is attached hereto as **Exhibit "B."**

17. Defendant is not and has never been licensed to use or display the Work. Defendant never contacted Plaintiff to seek permission to use the Work in connection with his business or for any other purpose.

18. Defendant utilized the Work for commercial use.

19. Upon information and belief, Defendant located a copy of the Work on the internet and, rather than contact Plaintiff to secure a license, simply copied the Work for his own commercial use.

20. Through his ongoing diligent efforts to identify unauthorized use of his photographs, Plaintiff discovered Defendant's unauthorized use/display of the Work in April 2023. Following Plaintiff's discovery, Plaintiff notified Defendant in writing of such unauthorized use. To date, Plaintiff has been unable to negotiate a reasonable license for the past/existing infringement of his Work.

21. All conditions precedent to this action have been performed or have been waived.

**COUNT I – COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT**

22. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates paragraphs 1 through 21 as set forth above.

23. The Work is an original work of authorship, embodying copyrightable subject matter, that is subject to the full protection of the United States copyright laws (17 U.S.C. § 101 *et seq.*).

24. Plaintiff owns a valid copyright in the Work, having registered the Work with the Register of Copyrights and owning sufficient rights, title, and interest to such copyright to afford Plaintiff standing to bring this lawsuit and assert the claim(s) herein.

25. As a result of Plaintiff's reproduction, distribution, and public display of the Work, Defendant had access to the Work prior to his own reproduction, distribution, and public display of the Work on his website, webpage, and/or social media.

26. Defendant reproduced, distributed, and publicly displayed the Work without authorization from Plaintiff.

27. By its actions, Defendant infringed and violated Plaintiff's exclusive rights in violation of the Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 501, by reproducing, distributing, and publicly displaying the Work for his own commercial purposes.

28. Defendant's infringement was willful as it acted with actual knowledge or reckless disregard for whether his conduct infringed upon Plaintiff's copyright. Defendant clearly understands that professional photography such as the Work is generally paid for and cannot simply be copied from the internet.

29. Plaintiff has been damaged as a direct and proximate result of Defendant's infringement.

30. Plaintiff is entitled to recover his actual damages resulting from Defendant's unauthorized use of the Work and, at Plaintiff's election (pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 504(b)), Plaintiff is entitled to recover damages based on a disgorgement of Defendant's profits from infringement of the Work, which amounts shall be proven at trial.

31. Alternatively, and at Plaintiff's election, Plaintiff is entitled to statutory damages pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 504(c), in such amount as deemed proper by the Court.

32. Pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 505, Plaintiff is further entitled to recover his costs and attorneys' fees as a result of Defendant's conduct.

33. Defendant's conduct has caused, and any continued infringing conduct will continue to cause, irreparable injury to Plaintiff unless enjoined by the Court. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law. Pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 502, Plaintiff is entitled to a permanent injunction prohibiting infringement of Plaintiff's exclusive rights under copyright law.

**WHEREFORE**, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant as follows:

- a. A declaration that Defendant has infringed Plaintiff's copyrights in the Work;
- b. A declaration that such infringement is willful;
- c. An award of actual damages and disgorgement of profits as the Court deems proper or, at Plaintiff's election, an award of statutory damages for willful infringement up to \$150,000.00 for each infringement of the Work;
- d. Awarding Plaintiff his costs and reasonable attorneys' fees pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 505;
- e. Awarding Plaintiff interest, including prejudgment interest, on the foregoing amounts;
- f. Permanently enjoining Defendant, its employees, agents, officers, directors, attorneys, successors, affiliates, subsidiaries and assigns, and all those in active concert and participation with Defendant, from directly or indirectly infringing Plaintiff's copyrights

or continuing to display, transfer, advertise, reproduce, or otherwise market any works derived or copied from the Work or to participate or assist in any such activity; and

g. For such other relief as the Court deems just and proper.

**Demand For Jury Trial**

Plaintiff demands a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

Dated: September 15, 2023.

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